Montclair State University
Montclair State University Digital Commons

Theses, Dissertations and Culminating Projects

8-2011

Poe's Women : A Male Obsession with Fear

Richard R. Carpenter

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/etd

 Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Poe's Women: A Male Obsession with Fear

by

Richard R. Carpenter

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

August 2011

College/School College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department English

Thesis Committee:

[redacted]

Dr. Monika Elbert
Thesis Sponsor

Certified by:

[redacted]

Dr. Marietta Morrissey
Dean of College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Aug. 16, 2011
(date)

[redacted]

Dr. Daniel Bronson
Committee Member

[redacted]

Dr. Jonathan Greenberg
Committee Member

[redacted]

Dr. Daniel Bronson
Department Chair

Abstract

While it is clear that women play an important role in many of the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, in many of his stories that center around women, more specifically, "Morella," "Ligeia," Berenice," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe, through his male protagonists, is conflicted over their characterization. On the one hand, these women are presented as extraordinarily powerful, which is manifested in either their intellectual or sexual dominance over their male counterparts. On the other, it is this dominance for which they are destroyed. In these tales the women must ultimately die—But why? In the case of Morella and Ligeia, for example, the women's superior intelligence is the symbolic key that could free them from their domestic "prisons" and give them an equal (or commanding) place in a world dominated by men. Similarly, Berenice and Madeline Usher are feared by their male counterparts, but these women are threatening not due to superior intellect but because of their sexuality. In "Morella," "Ligeia," "Berenice," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," the female protagonists are destroyed because their male counterparts fear and are threatened not only by the women themselves, but also by what they represent—intellectual and sexual dominance—which results in the loss of male authority.

POE'S WOMEN: A MALE OBSESSION WITH FEAR

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfullment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

by

RICHARD R. CARPENTER

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2011

Copyright c 2011 by *Richard R. Carpenter*. All rights reserved.

Table of Contents

Introduction

While it is clear that women play an important role in many of the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, in many of his stories that center around women, more specifically, "Morella," "Ligeia," "Berenice," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe, through his male protagonists, is conflicted over their characterization. On the one hand, these women are presented as extraordinarily powerful, which is manifested in either their intellectual or sexual dominance over their male counterparts. On the other, it is this dominance for which they are destroyed. In these tales the women must ultimately die—But why? In the case of Morella and Ligeia, for example, the women's superior intelligence is the symbolic key that could free them from their domestic "prisons" and give them an equal (or commanding) place in a world dominated by men. Similarly, Berenice and Madeline Usher are feared by their male counterparts, but these women are threatening not due to superior intellect but because of their sexuality. In "Morella," "Ligeia," "Berenice," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," the female protagonists are destroyed because their male counterparts fear and are threatened not only by the women themselves, but also by what they represent—intellectual and sexual dominance—which results in the loss of male authority.

The women become threats because "As feminism took root and sprang up in this country in the 1820s and '30s, issues of women's rights and equality with men emerged as controversial concerns" (Johanyak 62). As a result, each woman is "killed" because the male protagonist is threatened by either her aforementioned superior intellect or physical beauty and sexuality and "kills" his rival to remove her not only from the physical realm, but also from his consciousness. Cynthia S. Jordan states:

> they [the male protagonists] are neglectful guardians, obsessed with defending their own authority. Consequently, their repression takes the form of unconsciousness or forgetfulness, and . . . their acts of forgetting are willful, self-interested acts of aggression, paranoid attempts to repress the threat of feminine

> otherness, to kill out of consciousness any rival claims to masculine authority. (*Second Stories* 134)

Consequently, the burial of these women symbolizes not only the male protagonists' attempt to literally entomb them to conceal a crime, but also to repress any memory (and, in some cases, bury the guilt associated with the "murder") of these women, as well as the women themselves. However, in each of these tales, the women return (in some form) from their early entombment, and, more important, reemerge from the unconscious. Arthur A. Brown comments, "either the dead literally come back to life or undying death is given form in the event of a premature burial" (449) while Joan Dayan similarly writes, "the dead will not die. They will not stay buried. In Poe's tales these awfully corporeal ghosts are always women" (244).

In "Morella" and "Ligeia," the title characters are presented as intellectually superior to their male counterparts, and this authority has been viewed as that of a mother over her child. This terrifies the men because it threatens their position of dominance in the relationship. According to Debra Johanyak, "Poe's intellectual heroines are . . . feared or misunderstood by men who fail to understand or accept their quest for knowledge" (63). The narrator of "Morella" says: "Morella's erudition was profound. As I hope to live, her talents were of no common order—her powers of mind were gigantic. I felt this, and, in many matters, became her pupil" (Poe, "Morella" 234). The narrator is fully aware that she is vastly superior to him. Similarly, in "Ligeia," the narrator states, "I have spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense—such as I have never known in woman. . . . I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance . . ." (Poe, "Ligeia" 266). The narrator, moreover, likens himself "more than once, to a child, who has placed himself under the tutelage of a vastly superior being" (Zlotnick-Woldenberg). As Leland S. Person puts it, "He will be home-schooled by a mother-wife" ("Poe" 135). Carrie Zlotnick-Woldenberg writes, "Clearly, there is no equality in the relationship" and adds, "What is most evident in the relationship between the narrator and Ligeia is that the two are not on equal footing and are not engaged in a

reciprocal relationship." He is, as Grace McEntee calls him, "the submissive partner in a marriage of unequals" (79). Both narrators describe each woman's learning in detail, and as a result of the women's intellectual superiority over them, the male protagonists succumb; they are like children. Zlotnick-Woldenberg asserts, "The references to his childlike inferiority and his dependence on Ligeia suggest that on some level Ligeia is perceived as the good [or 'nurturing,' Zlotnick-Woldenberg's words] mother. She loves her child /husband passionately . . . she teaches him and serves as a source of his inspiration." Jordan similarly writes, "Ligeia's authority over him was like a mother over her child" and adds, "his language speaks of emasculation" (137), while Karen Weekes notes that "She dominates him even on her deathbed, as she 'peremptorily' commands him to recite the poem she wrote, and he immediately obeys" (157). Jordan also adds, "interspersed with these mother-child associations is the image of Ligeia as an aggressive sexual 'mentor,' a willful pleasurer . . ." (137). While I agree with Jordan's claim that "Ligeia's authority over him was like a mother over her child" (137), I do not see Ligeia (or Morella for that matter) as "an aggressive sexual 'mentor'" (Jordan 137), though I do see them, in terms of the mother-child relationship, as *possible* sexual *threats*.

Another *possible threat* to the male protagonists of "Morella" and "Ligeia" posed by the mother-child relationship is the Oedipal fear. Since the husbands are reduced to the role of child, any thought of a sexual relationship with their mother-wives is repulsive: "When his heroines grow beyond sexual stereotypes, Poe's protagonists find their love replaced by revulsion, and subsequently they destroy their lovers or wives through direct or indirect efforts" (Johanyak 63). "That Morella and Ligeia are described as seductive in appearance and behavior suggests the erotic fantasies and sexual stereotyping of Poe's narrators," writes Johanyak, "[b]ut it is clear that the romantic relationship in both tales is never satisfactorily conducted or culminated, due to both husbands' inability to tolerate their wives' superior learning" (63-64). Again, Ligeia and Morella are intellectually, not sexually, threatening to their respective narrators, and it is the power of

their minds that the men fear because of what it represents—the loss of dominance not only in a male-dominated world, but also in the home.

In looking at nineteenth-century gender constructions, "Poe's domestic tales," writes Person, "depict the home as the nightmarish site of barely repressed hostility between men and women" ("Poe" 134). This is seen in Poe's women-centered tales, such as "Morella," when the narrator states, "I longed with an earnest and consuming desire for the moment of Morella's decease" ("Morella" 236). Though the hostility may be "barely repressed" (Person, "Poe" 134), it is the women themselves whom the males *attempt* to repress. Person states:

> Rowena assumes the form of the dead Ligeia, Morella's daughter assumes her mother's name and appearance, Egaeus repossesses the teeth of the entombed Berenice, and Madeline Usher returns from her tomb to accuse her brother of having killed her. In these stories . . . the male who tries to deny or change a woman in her most challenging aspect is haunted by the image he has resisted and repressed. (*Aesthetic* 23)

Moreover, Person writes, "the ideal nineteenth-century household [was] supported by a male breadwinner" ("Poe" 136). However, the intellectual power and dominant position in the domestic realm of both Morella and Ligeia challenge this nineteenth-century ideal. Person, in fact, comments that "The married narrator's of . . . 'Morella,' and 'Ligeia' do not seem to be breadwinners" ("Poe" 158). In addition, since the male protagonists "resign" themselves to the "guidance" of Morella and Ligeia, they also relinquish their "dominance" over each woman and in doing so, lose their masculine identity:

> I soon, however, found that, perhaps on account of her Presberg education, she placed before me a number of those mystical writings which are usually considered the mere dross of the early German literature. These, for what reason I could not imagine, were her favorite and constant study—and that, in process of

> time they became my own, should be attributed to the simple but effectual influence of habit and example. (Poe, "Morella" 234)

With these lines, "Morella"'s narrator "abandoned [him]self implicitly to the guidance of [his] wife, and entered with an unflinching heart into the intricacies of *her* [my italics] studies" (Poe, "Morella" 234). In the process, he abandons his own, masculine identity. It is Morella's intellectual power and what it represents—her domination over him—that he hates, and as a result, he must destroy Morella to regain his authority. Weekes similarly notes, "One theory for the rejection of his wife is her intellectual threat" (157), while Person asserts, "Morella's strength of character, her individuality and learning, seems to inspire the narrator's hatred" ("Poe" 140). As such, the intellectual superiority (in addition to their "maternal" relationship to their "child-like" counterparts) of both Morella and Ligeia threatens the men because they lose their position of dominance in the domestic realm.

In continuing with the trend of nineteenth-century gender constructions, the superior intelligence of Morella and Ligeia also reverses the roles between the women and men and threatens the men because they, again, lose their dominance. Johanyak writes, "These women's aspirations to or attainment of supraordinary learning threaten the patriarchal dominance of Poe's heroes. . . . [and] reveal startling role exchanges . . ." and adds:

> . . . she is not connected to traditionally domestic occupations or pastimes, but rather to a literary motif embedded in a pursuit of "forbidden" knowledge—a pursuit that allows Poe's heroines to acquire personal interests and aspirations having little to do with the domestic roles generally assigned to wives and mothers of this period. Such heroines may be considered "dangerous" in the sense that they posed threats to a male-dominated society . . . . (63)

Morella and Ligeia exemplify this threat and must be destroyed by the men who have the most to lose, their husbands. Of Ligeia, Person points out, "[she] reverses the conventional power imbalance between husband and wife. Whereas a True Woman was supposed to be submissive

and 'completely dependent' upon her husband . . . Ligeia remands the narrator to a feminine place within the domestic sphere" ("Poe" 135). Like Morella, Ligeia becomes the ruling one as the male loses his dominance. Person goes on to say that "Ligeia resists a conventional female role even in her death" as "She wills herself back to life . . ." ("Poe" 136).

While Person and Johanyak focus primarily on gender constructs, some critics discuss the tale in other ways, more specifically, as a supernatural account, citing that Ligeia's resurrection actually occurs. It has been written that "Ligeia" "has traditionally been read as a supernatural tale in which the will of the dead woman is strong enough to overcome death, an idea alluded to in the story's epigraph' [sic] which is attributed to Joseph Glanvill, and referred to several times subsequently" (Zlotnick-Woldenberg). This supernatural interpretation illustrates that Ligeia (as well as Morella) is powerful even in death and now, perhaps, is even stronger than while living. Weekes writes, "In . . . 'Morella' and 'Ligeia,' the heroines' unexpected capacities for life beyond the grave indicate that females may have more strength and initiative than the delicate models of his verse" (148). Viewing the tale as a supernatural account, McEntee is one such critic who discusses this "resurrection" (80), as "Ligeia staggers out of Rowena's deathbed" (81). D. H. Lawrence even likens the narrator to a vampire: "It is easy to see why each man kills the things he loves. To *know* a living thing is to kill it. You have to kill a thing to know it satisfactorily. For this reason, the desirous consciousness [of Ligeia's husband] . . . is a vampire" and adds, "But to try to *know* any living being is to try to suck the life out of that being" (70). While Lawrence's vampire reference may be "a wild exaggeration," writes Zlotnick-Woldenberg, the notion of Ligeia's revivification is not, as her "return" from the dead represents her reemergence from the narrator's unconscious.

Other critics, however, like Zlotnick-Woldenberg, believe that "Ligeia" is not a supernatural tale, but a psychological one. She argues, "the narrator, functioning primarily in the schizoid position and employing such defense mechanisms as splitting and projection-which already require a high degree of fantasy-is not an unlikely candidate for such a [psychotic] break"

and claims, "Ligeia sounds more like a figment of the narrator's imagination than an actual woman" (Zlotnick-Woldenberg). Person similarly notes that by "Disengaging Ligeia from her familial and cultural origins and making her a pure product of imagination, the narrator remembers almost nothing about her that would situate her in the world of history and culture" ("Poe" 144). Zlotnick-Woldenberg concludes, "What seems to him a triumph over death is actually a psychotic break." I view the tale as both supernatural and psychological but do not believe Ligeia to be a product of the narrator's imagination, as Zlotnick-Woldenberg and Person assert; rather, Ligeia's resurrection again symbolizes her return not only from the dead, but also from the narrator's unconscious mind. Person perhaps puts it best when he states, "whether the story is read as a supernatural account of Ligeia's resurrection or as a psychological account of the narrator's hallucination, Ligeia herself has a powerful creative presence in the text. Either as a symbol of the narrator's creative potential or as a creator in her own right, Ligeia resists objectification, death, and denial" (*Aesthetic* 32).

While Morella and Ligeia are threatening due to their "superior learning," the women who are sexual threats, moreso than Morella and Ligeia as Jordan suggests, are Berenice and Madeline Usher. Unlike Morella and Ligeia, in "Berenice" and "The Fall of the House of Usher," no mention is made of Berenice's and Madeline Usher's "learning." In fact, in "Berenice," it is the narrator and male protagonist, Egaeus, who is the embodiment of knowledge; he was born in the library chamber of his hereditary halls, and there he remains. Likewise, in "The Fall of the House of Usher," Roderick Usher is the learned one while Madeline is cited as never actually leaving her ancestral home. In these two tales, the women are not intellectually superior to their male counterparts. In fact, in both tales, neither woman ever utters a word. Weekes writes, "Madeline Usher is speechless in her only pre-entombed appearance; Berenice smiled her ghastly grin but 'spoke no word'" (150). Diane Long Hoeveler adds, "Madeline is a particularly sterile, empty woman. She never speaks in the text, and through her silence she quite

literally tropes the woman as textual absence . . ." (389). In "Berenice," the title character is not intellectually threatening to Egaeus:

> Berenice and I were cousins, and we grew up together in my paternal halls. Yet differently we grew—I ill of health and buried in gloom—she agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy—hers the ramble on the hill-side—mine the studies of the cloister—I living within my own heart, and addicted body and soul to the most intense and painful meditation—she roaming carelessly through life with no thought of the shadows in her path . . . . (Poe, "Berenice" 226)

Growing up, Egaeus lived a life of confinement in the family's library chamber. In stark contrast, Berenice can best be described as a "free spirit" who seemingly has little knowledge of the library and its contents.

Berenice and Madeline Usher, in their silence, are not intellectual threats to the male protagonists, as they have no voice. They are, however, threatening in another way, sexually. Though Berenice poses no intellectual threat, it is her "smile of peculiar meaning" (Poe, "Berenice" 230) and the sexuality that it represents that frightens and threatens Egaeus. Moreover, as white is a symbol of purity, Berenice's "excessively white" (Poe, "Berenice" 230) teeth suggest her sexual innocence, which terrifies the narrator and inspires his hatred. Of the teeth, Lawrence comments, "they are little fixed ideas of mordant hate" (76). Egaeus becomes obsessed with the teeth that were disclosed during that fateful smile because he is fearful of the sexuality they represent. It is that obsession that drives him to madness and murder.

Some critics view the teeth, like I do, as representing Berenice's emerging sexuality. Weekes writes, "if the 'peculiar meaning' of Berenice's grin is of carnal desire, the cerebral narrator would be . . . overcome" (156) and correctly points out that "she is exchanging her innocence for sexuality, a prospect that would terrify her reclusive, passionless fiancé" (156). The narrator is so intellectual that any thought of the sexual, especially with the virginal Berenice, frightens him.

Weekes, however, offers another explanation of the smile. She refers to it

> as a suggestion of the inevitability of the narrator's similar fate. Upon seeing Berenice, her fiancé has already become corpse-like: he suffers an "icy chill" throughout his frame, he falls "for some time breathless and motionless." Upon seeing her teeth and ghastly smile, he wishes for death and then fades from the reader's sight into the void of the major ellipsis. The teeth are horrific because, as Liliane Weissberg points out, the "symmetry and lifeless luster of her teeth – indicators of health and beauty – become noticeable only in their difference from the decaying body." Her emaciated, bleached features are already skeleton-like, and these teeth are a source of horror in the skull-like face. (156)

Brown has a slightly different reading of the smile. He does not believe that Egaeus, upon seeing the teeth, wishes, as Weekes does, for death; rather, he believes one of the things the narrator fears is that which lies beyond the grave:

> The teeth are that part of a human face that remains after death, belonging less to the face than to the skull. In them Egaeus feels the terror of existence after death—he sees death as other than death. . . . What this presence of undying death makes clear to Egaeus is that he himself is not yet dead. What he fears most upon seeing the teeth is not death but the inability to die. (Brown 459)

Though these interpretations are plausible, I contend Egaeus is threatened, as does Weekes's earlier claim, by Berenice's emerging sexuality. To Egaeus, the teeth represent her sexual innocence, not "an expression of death" (460), as Brown suggests. As Person points out, "Several critics have noted the suggestive language of this description ["and in a smile of peculiar meaning, *the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves to my view" (Poe, "Berenice" 230)] and concluded that the narrator particularly fears Berenice's sexuality, which he represents as a *vagina dentata*" ("Poe" 139). Furthermore, Egaeus's "fad[ing] from the reader's sight into

the void of the major ellipsis" (Weekes 156) represents his repression of extracting Berenice's teeth. Weekes writes, "[Berenice as sexualized creature is] fulfilled in Egaeus's pulling her teeth in order to gain mastery over the ideas they represent. He destroys the vision of the ghastly grinning skull and also desexualizes the corpse by removing this token of devouring carnality" (156). By desexualizing the corpse, Egaeus regains, albeit temporarily, his dominant position in the relationship, as he has control over that which terrifies him.

Roderick Usher has little reason to fear his sister's intellect, but like Berenice, Madeline also has a "suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip" (Poe, "Fall" 329) that threatens Roderick. Her smile is threatening because it represents the nature of their relationship—an incestuous one. Roderick faces the necessity of incest with Madeline, his "tenderly beloved sister—his sole companion for long years—his last and only relative on earth" (Poe, "Fall" 323), in order for the Usher line to continue: "the stem of the Usher race . . . had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch . . . [and] the entire family lay in the direct line of descent" (Poe, "Usher" 318). Hoeveler similarly comments that "Roderick is specifically described as the last 'of the ancient race of the Ushers,' a family that never put forth collateral branches due to its incestuous inbreeding" (389).

While Hoeveler believes that inbreeding is prevalent, she also views the tale as a psychological account. She, similar to Zlotnick-Woldenberg's and Person's assertions about Ligeia, suggests that Madeline is a creation of Roderick's fragmented mind:

> It is no coincidence that Madeline is Roderick's sister and thus under the incest taboo. It is also no coincidence that he experiences himself as walled in by a rotting house/body, or that he literally walls his abjected self/his "sister" into a tomb. . . . But Madeline functions throughout the fiction as the complete psychic projection of Roderick, the body/feminine he projects, ab-jects, out of himself in disgust. (Hoeveler 392)

Hoeveler's notion of Madeline as a creation of Roderick's mind is furthered when she writes: ". . . another . . . component in Roderick's . . . fantasy is the dream of a purely masculine

universe, . . . where males engage in discourse without the intrusion of the female in any form—living or dead . . . Roderick's fantasy of the purely masculine mind is subverted, however, by his compulsion to create a self-projected fantasy of a female double" (388). In short, "Roderick's sister Madeline . . . functions as that abjected aspect of Roderick's self-loathing ego. He projects out of himself his feminine element as a 'twin sister,' what . . . is known . . . in traditional psychoanalysis as the fragmented self, the idealized double or alter-ego" (Hoeveler 391).

Though there can be little debate that Roderick's mind is fragmented, I do not see Madeline as a creation of it. In the tale, Madeline is as much a "character" and as "real" as Roderick. Perhaps a better explanation of Madeline is offered by Person, who states, "Initially, as fraternal twins, Roderick and Madeline compliment each other; here in assuming a male guise, Madeline is much more a narcissistic mirror-image of her brother" (*Aesthetic* 39). Paradoxically, Roderick's destruction of Madeline is the destruction of his narcissistic self; hence, "'The Fall of the House of Usher' can thus be considered Poe's most dramatic account of the male's self-destructive repression of women" (Person, *Aesthetic* 35). Person continues, "as if in burying her, Roderick has meant to repress her sex, her womanhood" (*Aesthetic* 39). While I agree with Person's claims, more specifically the latter, Madeline's burial is far more than Roderick's attempt to repress her womanhood. I assert that her burial symbolizes the guilt Roderick feels over being faced with having to have (or having had) intercourse with his sister in order for the Usher line to continue. Here, it should also be emphasized that Madeline is not only Roderick's sister, but also his twin, the "mirror-image" (*Aesthetic* 39), as Person puts it, of himself. By violating Madeline, Roderick, in essence, is, again, destroying himself and, in both cases, is overcome with unimaginable guilt. Roderick's burying of his sister is his attempt to relieve himself of this feeling. J. Gerald Kennedy, on the other hand, believes, "when Roderick Usher commits the atrocity of burying his sister prematurely—mindful of her predisposition to catalepsy— [he does so] to protect himself from what Madeline represents: mortality, loss, and abandonment" (540). However, if Roderick buries his sister to relieve his guilt, as I assert, then

perhaps this is one of the contributing reasons that Roderick is "self-loathing" (391), as Hoeveler believes.

While some critics, like Hoeveler, believe "The Fall of the House of Usher" to be a psychological tale, others, like Beverly Voloshin, view the story as a supernatural account, more specifically, as having ties to vampirism. If this is the case, then these interpretations also show Roderick to be sexually threatened by his sister, as a link between vampirism and sexuality is present. Voloshin writes:

> [A]n utterly strange atmosphere; a mysterious, decaying castle; an undead corpse; the blasting of the Usher line – strongly suggest the supernatural. . . . Roderick and Madeline seem doomed, for . . . their house has been placed under the curse of vampirism . . . Roderick and Madeline, thin and pale, resemble the victims of vampires. Their sickness, like vampirism, is incurable. . . . Roderick tries to inter his still-living sister in a vault where, it seems, no light will reach her; thus the sister will be killed and not return to suck out her brother's life. For moonlight, and especially the light of the full moon, will revive a vampire. But the trick doesn't work, and Roderick is overcome with terror as he anticipates Madeline's re-emergence. In vampire lore, the curse of vampirism on a line entails its destruction, for vampires attack their next of kin, ... ("Explanation" 421-22)

Voloshin's interpretation of the Ushers as vampires, like Zlotnick-Woldenberg calls Lawrence's vampire reference in Ligeia, may be "wildly exaggerated"; however, it does illustrate that Roderick is sexually threatened by his sister.

Whether these women pose an intellectual threat or a sexual one, or whether these women are real or imagined, they are, nevertheless, a threat to masculinity. In "Morella," "Ligeia," "Berenice," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," the female protagonists are

destroyed because their male counterparts fear and are threatened not only by the women themselves, but also by what they represent—intellectual and sexual dominance.

Chapter One: The Fear and Threat of the Intellectual Woman – Morella and Ligeia

In discussing Poe's portraits of nineteenth-century gentlemen, Leland S. Person notes that most "scholars have devoted little attention to Poe's male characters" and believes "[they] seem more substantial than his female characters, if only because they typically narrate his tales in the first person and thus allow us to infer much about their gendered identities" ("Poe" 149). Person goes on to say that "Poe did engage contemporaneous issues surrounding nineteenth-century manhood in his writing" ("Poe" 150). One such concern was "the issues of women's rights and equality with men" (Johanyak 62). In "Morella" and "Ligeia," however, Poe reverses the power imbalance between the genders as the male protagonists' equality with their female counterparts is explored. Debra Johanyak writes:

> "Morella" and "Ligeia" most obviously depict the dark heroine as feministic. That is, she is not connected to traditionally domestic occupations or pastimes, but rather to a literary motif embedded in the pursuit of "forbidden" knowledge—a pursuit that allows Poe's heroines to acquire personal interests and aspirations having little to do with the domestic roles generally assigned wives and mothers of this period. Such heroines may be considered "dangerous" in the sense that they posed threats to a male-dominated society, because "female independent selfhood was . . . defined by the traditional patriarchy as theologically evil, biologically unnatural, psychologically unhealthy, and socially in bad taste." (63)

Johanyak also comments that both husbands cannot tolerate their wives' superior learning (64), and it is for that reason that they, one overtly and the other more subtly, wish for their wives' demise. Person writes, "Just as his portraits of women deviate weirdly from nineteenth-century models of ideal womanhood, his depictions of men and male behavior reveal extraordinary tensions between a gentlemanly surface and volatile, even violent depths" ("Poe" 150). Like the female protagonists in "Morella" and "Ligeia" depart from "ideal womanhood," the husbands of

these tales "deviate . . . from nineteenth-century models of ideal" (Person, "Poe" 150) *manhood* as they are reduced to children. In the above-mentioned tales, when each narrator realizes that his authority over each woman has been supplanted as a result of her superior intellect and subsequent gender reversals, these "volatile, even violent depths" (Person, "Poe" 150) are unveiled, and he is forced to "kill" to reclaim his dominance and manhood.

In the case of Ligeia and, even moreso, Morella, these are not actual murders; rather, each woman, through her death, is "killed" from the narrators' consciousness. Moreover, their eventual return from the dead not only symbolizes their emergence from the unconscious of their male counterparts to regain control of them, but also their emergence from the repressive conditions women faced during the nineteenth century. When the male protagonists of these tales attempt to bury, both literally and psychologically, the women, they return, in some form, to torment the men. In both "Morella" and "Ligeia," Poe's men fear the female protagonists, as they are threatened by the women's intellectual superiority, which results in gender role reversals and the loss of masculine authority and identity. As a result, the men must destroy the women to reclaim their position of dominance.

"Morella" opens with an exposition that explains how the title character and narrator first became acquainted. More important, however, is that it places Morella in a familiar setting for nineteenth-century women, the home: "She . . . shunned society, and, attaching herself to me alone, rendered me happy" (Poe, "Morella" 234). The tale of "Morella" begins:

> With a feeling of deep yet most singular affection I regarded my friend Morella. Thrown by accident into her society many years ago, my soul, from our first meeting, burned with fires it had never before known; but the fires were not of Eros, and bitter and tormenting to my spirit was the gradual conviction that I could in no manner define their unusual meaning, or regulate their vague intensity. Yet we met; and fate bound us together at the altar; and I never spoke of passion, nor thought of love. (Poe, "Morella" 234)

Though the narrator cannot characterize these "fires" (Poe, "Morella" 234), he does confess that he had never loved her in any fashion—"the fires were not of Eros" (Poe, "Morella" 234). (Eros, in Greek Mythology, is the god of love.) Nevertheless, he was joyful because, again, Morella avoided society and attached herself solely to him, which places her in the domestic sphere and subservient to him. Johanyak writes, "he boasts that she devotes herself solely to making him happy, which satisfies his egotistical desire to be the center of her life" (64). At this point in the tale, he is seemingly the dominant one in the relationship. According to Peter Coviello, "What sustains them in this 'fateful' bond of seemingly incommensurable affections are Morella's curious studies" (893). While Coviello makes a valid argument, it is those "curious studies" (893) that also inspires the narrator's hatred for Morella. Initially, the narrator seems content with their relationship but soon realizes Morella is a threat to him on account of her extensive learning, and he fears what that learning represents—Morella's opportunity to escape her world of domesticity, their gender reversal, and ultimately, his loss of authority. Johanyak also believes she is a threat: "'Morella' . . . presents a woman of emotional intensity and determined will who threatens the narrator with complexities which he cannot understand, let alone reciprocate" (64). Initially, Morella assumes a domestic role; however, the narrator soon realizes that, as a result of her intellectual superiority over him, it is *he*, rather than Morella, who has been relegated to the domestic world, which places her in a position of dominance. To illustrate this, as well as Morella's scholarship, the narrator states:

> Morella's erudition was profound. As I hope to live, her talents were of no common order—her powers of mind were gigantic. I felt this, and, in many matters, became her pupil. . . . [H]er favorite and constant study . . . became my own . . . I abandoned myself implicitly to the guidance of my wife, and entered with an unflinching heart into the intricacies of her studies. . . . And then, hour after hour, would I linger by her side . . . . (Poe, "Morella" 234-35)

With this passage, the narrator becomes Morella's pupil, takes on her favorite study, and abandons himself to her guidance, thus, giving up his own identity by attaching himself to *her*. It is when "poring over forbidden pages" (Poe, "Morella" 234)—*her* favorite study—that he realizes a "forbidden spirit" (Poe, "Morella" 234)—Morella—has consumed him. He becomes terrified that, through her intellect, Morella now has control over him—their roles have been reversed, and, as Johanyak puts it, they undergo "startling role exchanges" (63). Johanyak adds, "By demonstrating profound knowledge and comprehension of complex philosophies, Morella places herself in juxtaposition with her husband, as though, unintentionally, to challenge his own learning and innocently usurp his spiritual authority within the marriage" (65). As a result of her usurpation of his authority, the narrator begins to loathe his wife.

Once he realizes his lack of authority over Morella as a result of her extensive learning, the narrator's earlier "affection" (Poe, "Morella" 234) turns to hatred as he states, "I longed with an earnest and consuming desire for the moment of Morella's decease" (Poe, "Morella" 236). Person writes, "Morella's strength of character, her individuality and learning, seems to inspire the narrator's hatred" ("Poe" 140), while Coviello comments, "He desires its arrival [her decease] as he has never desired the person of his wife" (893). Furthermore, Johanyak asserts:

> In "Morella," the wife's and daughter's deaths derive from the husband-father's loathing and rejection. Neither commits an offense against him except in their intellectual attainments, which the narrator refuses to tolerate in his need to remain the center of their lives. It is the narrator's failure to live up to his marital and paternal duties, and his reactionary horror to his wife's and daughter's achievements, that constitute the evil in this tale. (66)

Moreover, the narrator wishes for Morella (and later his daughter) to be destroyed because the power of her mind represents her power over him. After clinging to life for many, as the narrator puts it, "irksome months" (Poe, "Morella" 236), Morella, during childbirth, finally dies, but not before giving birth to a daughter whom the narrator "loved . . . with a love more fervent than I

had believed it possible to feel for any denizen of earth" (Poe, "Morella" 237). Johanyak claims, "it is clear that the romantic relationship . . . is never satisfactorily conducted or culminated" (64). While it may be true that it is not *satisfactorily* handled, one thing is clear—the relationship has been consummated. Coviello offers another explanation, which, in addition to fearing Morella's extensive learning, also illustrates another possible fear of the narrator's—his fear of intimacy and sexuality, especially as it relates to his wife. (The fear of sexuality will be explored further in the following chapter with my discussion of "Berenice" and "The Fall of the House of Usher.) The narrator so greatly despises Morella that he has removed any remembrance of a sexual encounter with his wife from his memory. Of the child's conception, and of the narrator's hatred for Morella, Coviello writes:

> The narrator's unblinking refusal to remark, until the last possible instant, the pregnancy which resulted (we are given only to assume) from some point of erotic consummation seems to register as forcefully as any other of the story's details the depth of his distaste for the idea of sexual commerce with his wife: such an event may perhaps be evidenced, but is apparently too repugnant to him to be adumbrated or even passingly recalled. The pain of such connubial revulsion is not lost on Morella. Her curse, in fact, is a particularly ingenious one, insofar as it seizes upon her dispassionate husband's stalled desire and turns its lacerating effects back upon him. (894)

Though Coviello presents a compelling argument regarding the narrator's dislike of even the thought of sex with his wife, it is not her sexuality that he fears and hates; rather, it is Ligeia's (and now his daughter's) intellectual superiority that threatens him.

Morella's "curse," as Coviello calls it, is carried out through the child, and through the child, the narrator continues to be threatened by the superior intellect of the woman/child. Of the child's development the narrator states, "she grew strangely in stature and intellect, and was the perfect resemblance of her who had departed" (Poe, "Morella" 237). That the child's physical

features were not unlike Morella's, the narrator could tolerate: "For that her smile was like her mother's I could bear . . . that her eyes were like Morella's I could endure" (Poe, "Morella" 238). However, it is the intellect, or, as the narrator puts it, "mental being" (Poe, "Morella" 237) of the child that deeply disturbs him, and as a result, his love for his daughter, just like his "love" for Morella, turns to abhorrence:

> But, ere long, the heaven of this pure affection became darkened, the gloom, and horror, and grief, swept over it in clouds. I said the child grew strangely in stature and intelligence. Strange indeed was her rapid increase in bodily size—but terrible, oh! terrible were the tumultuous thoughts which crowded upon me while watching the development of her mental being. Could it be otherwise, when I daily discovered in the conceptions of the child the adult powers and faculties of the woman?—when the lessons of experience fell from the lips of infancy? and when the wisdom or the passions of maturity I found hourly gleaming from its full and speculative eye? (Poe, "Morella" 237)

Though the narrator finds the child's rapid physical growth merely "Strange" (Poe, "Morella" 237), it is only when the child shows intellectual growth that he becomes terrified—she is a constant reminder of Morella's authority over him. Johanyak writes, "In her mother's likeness, the second Morella becomes even more repulsive than the first, because she represents even more strongly the independent strengths and talents for which her mother died—just as in feminism, each succeeding generation reinforces more strongly and demonstrates more clearly the evolution of women's individuality and rights" (66). Person comments, "instead of encouraging his daughter's independent identity, the narrator kills her (kills her individuality) by forging a 'too perfect identity' between mother and child. He has only room enough in his consciousness for one idea of woman. All women look and are alike" ("Poe" 140-41). The narrator later names his unnamed daughter Morella, and thus, supports Person's claim. Johanyak makes a similar claim but interestingly notes that

> A newborn infant—symbolic of [John] Locke's "tabula rasa"—provides the father with hope of writing his own thoughts and values upon the child's life by denying her individuality. But the child's rapid growth and mental propensities reveal her unique development to be as avant-garde as her mother's had been. A helpless spectator, the narrator rebuffs and scorns the child because of her strong maternal resemblance and heritage. (65)

Johanyak believes that because his loathing is so great, "the narrator's guilt threatens to overwhelm him, [and] he projects his horror and anger upon the child" (66). I disagree. The narrator shows no signs of remorse or guilt; rather, much like he feared Morella's intellect, the narrator also fears the power of the child's mind and what it represents—the loss of masculine authority. In fact, like Morella, the child, at even such a young age, is initially a "captive" to the domestic world: "the rigid seclusion of her days precluded all other intercourse . . . Indeed, during the brief period of her existence, the latter had received no impressions from the outward world" (Poe, "Morella" 238). From the outset of the child's life, the narrator attempts to control her as he did her mother. However, the child's rapid physical and mental growth, like Morella's superior intellect, threatens to reverse the gender roles and make the narrator subordinate to not his wife but his daughter.

That the narrator does not name the child until her baptismal ceremony serves as another example of his attempt to repress womanhood, the memory of Morella, and what she represents. He states, "Thus passed away two lustra of her life, and, as yet, my daughter remained nameless upon the earth. 'My child' and 'my love' were the designations usually prompted by a father's affection . . . Morella's name died with her at her death. Of the mother I had never spoken to the daughter . . ." (Poe, "Morella" 238). Cynthia S. Jordan writes, "Morella's narrator-husband comes to a point where he can 'no longer bear . . . the low tone of her musical language,' and after she dies she is denied a place in his own speech . . ." ("Poe's" 3). Moreover, the narrator's fear of and hatred for Morella and what she represents has forced him to "kill" her from his

consciousness, and by never uttering her name, it as though she never existed. By never mentioning her, the narrator has regained his position of dominance. Her name "was impossible to speak" (Poe, "Morella" 238) because merely the *mention* of *it* is threatening. The narrator, however, "at the baptismal font" (Poe, "Morella" 238), must name the child. Once he does, Morella emerges from his unconscious, as does that which threatens him—his loss of power. He states:

> And . . . I hesitated for a name. . . . What prompted me, then, to disturb the memory of the buried dead? What demon urged me to breathe that sound, which, in its very recollection was wont to make ebb the purple blood in its torrents from the temples to the heart? What fiend spoke from the recesses of my soul, when, amid those dim aisles, and in the silence of the night, I whispered within the ears of the holy man the syllables—Morella? What more than fiend convulsed the features of my child, and overspread them with hues of death, as, starting at that scarcely audible sound, she turned her glassy eyes from the earth to heaven, and falling prostrate on the black slabs of our ancestral vault, responded—"I am here!" (Poe, "Morella" 238)

Though the return of Morella in the form of the child is a supernatural occurrence, it again, and more importantly, symbolizes her return from the narrator's unconscious. In this sense, Morella is reborn, and the narrator becomes even more threatened than before. The only way for him to again regain control is to destroy that which now threatens him. Haunted by Morella, he murders the reminder of his deceased wife, his daughter: "But she died; and within my own hands I bore her to the tomb; and I laughed with a long and bitter laugh as I found no traces of the first, in the charnel where I laid the second—Morella" (Poe, "Morella" 239). That the first Morella is no longer confined to the literal tomb suggests that, through death, she has escaped not only the "entombment" of the home, but has also, and more important, emerged from the unconscious of the narrator to torment him:

> Distinct, coldly, calmly distinct, fell those few simple sounds within my ear, and thence, like molten lead, rolled hissingly into my brain. Years—years may pass away, but the memory of that epoch—never! . . . And I kept no reckoning of time or place, and the stars of my fate faded from heaven, and therefore the earth grew dark, and its figures passed by me, like flitting shadows, and among them all I beheld only—Morella. The winds of the firmament breathed but one sound within my ears, and the ripples upon the sea murmured evermore—Morella. (Poe, "Morella" 239)

Morella, no longer in the charnel, has also returned from being buried in the narrator's unconscious, and, as a result, has dominion over him once again.

In focusing my attention on the second of Poe's tales in which the male protagonist fears and is threatened by the intellectual superiority a woman has over him, I turn to "Ligeia." Unlike "Morella," the narrator of this tale claims to love the title character: "the character of my beloved, her rare learning, her singular yet placid cast of beauty, and the thrilling and enthralling eloquence of her low musical language, made their way into my heart by paces so steadily and stealthily progressive that they have been unnoticed and unknown" (Poe, "Ligeia" 262). Also unlike "Morella," where the narrator of that tale remembers their initial encounter—"Thrown by accident into her society many years ago, my soul, from our first meeting, burned with fires it had never before known" (Poe, "Morella" 234)—the narrator of "Ligeia" cannot recall anything about their first meeting: "I CANNOT, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia. . . . I have *never known* the paternal name of her who was my friend and my betrothed, and who became the partner of my studies, and finally the wife of my bosom" (Poe, "Ligeia" 262). Some critics, like Person, interpret this passage to mean that Ligeia is a creation of the narrator's now opium-induced mind. Person writes, "Disengaging Ligeia from her familial and cultural origins and making her a pure product of imagination, the narrator remembers almost nothing about her that would situate her in the world of history and

culture" ("Poe" 144). Of the narrator's troubled mind, Jordan asserts, "The narrator's reference to his 'child-like' confidence in Ligeia's 'infinite supremacy' is repeated—'Without Ligeia I was but a child groping benighted'—and the effect of his metaphorical associations is to point out again the conflicted workings of his mind" (137). Ligeia, however, is not "a pure product of imagination" ("Poe" 144), as Person suggests, but a living, breathing being. In contrast to Person's claim, Marie Bonaparte writes, "He ignores even the family name or, as he says, the 'paternal name' of this unique, superior woman . . . All he knows is that she appears and thenceforth reigns over his life" (224). Bonaparte further comments, "the hero of the tale found his bride, as the child finds its mother, without effort or seeking, nor any knowledge of her origins or 'paternal name', (possibly a device of the wish-phantasy to suppress the envied rival, the father)" (229). Bonaparte's comparison of the narrator and Ligeia to a child and mother is noteworthy, as Ligeia becomes a maternal figure to the child-like narrator. (This notion will be further explored later in this chapter.) With regard to the family name, Joan Dayan offers another explanation. She believes "Ligeia would not tell her lover about her family, or ever reveal the 'paternal name'" (Dayan 260), suggesting it was a conscious and deliberate action on her part. While Dayan may be correct in her interpretation, Bonaparte's claims are more accurate, as they reveal the reason the narrator intentionally chooses to not remember—it is a reminder of Ligeia's dominance over the now child-like narrator.

Though the narrator cannot remember how, when, or even where he first met Ligeia, he goes on to state that "There is one dear topic, however, on which my memory fails me not. It is the *person* of Ligeia" (Poe, "Ligeia" 263). He describes her in great detail:

> In stature she was tall, somewhat slender . . . In beauty of face no maiden ever equaled her. . . . the lofty and pale forehead . . . was faultless . . . the skin rival[ed] the purest ivory . . . and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses . . . I looked at the delicate outlines of the nose . . . I

> regarded the sweet mouth. . . . I scrutinized the formation of the chin . . . . (Poe, "Ligeia" 263-64)

Though the narrator is able to vividly recall "the *person* of Ligeia" (Poe, "Ligeia" 263), it is strange that he is unable to remember his initial meeting with the woman he claims to have "the most passionate devotion" (Poe, "Ligeia" 262) for. Is it that he cannot remember, or, as stated earlier, is it that he chooses not to remember: "Or, perhaps, I cannot *now* bring these points to mind" (Poe, "Ligeia" 262)? With this line, the narrator attempts to bury any memory of Ligeia because it is a reminder of her extensive and superior learning, as well as the loss of his authority over her that is its result. The narrator is threatened by Ligeia's intellect and the subsequent role reversal:

> I have spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense—such as I have never known in woman. . . . I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman . . . the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding; yet I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance . . . . (Poe, "Ligeia" 266)

The narrator's repetition of the phrase "such as I have never known in woman" (Poe, "Ligeia" 266) (when speaking of Ligeia's learning and knowledge), reinforces her dominance over him and his subservient position in the relationship. Like the narrator of "Morella," who becomes her pupil, takes on her favorite study, and abandon's himself to her guidance, the narrator of "Ligeia," "sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy" (Poe, "Ligeia" 266), similarly "resign[s] . . . [him]self, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance" (Poe, "Ligeia" 266). He also states that "Without Ligeia I was but as a child groping benighted" (Poe, "Ligeia" 266). Here, their roles are reversed, and the narrator, like a child, assumes a subordinate role in the relationship and relinquishes his dominance. Ligeia, a woman of the nineteenth century, under normal circumstances, would be the one who is viewed as a subordinate. There is, however, little that is normal about this tale.

Unlike in "Morella," where the husband takes on the role of wife, the narrator of "Ligeia" becomes like a child with Ligeia undertaking the role of mother. Dawn Keetley writes, "Their bond is exclusive but not defined by romantic love, appearing to partake instead of the infant-mother relationship. In 'Ligeia,' the bond is still more obviously akin to that of a mother and child" (4). Ligeia is, as Ronald Bieganowski puts it, "his maternal instructor" (180), while Bonaparte points out that "the bride possesses the maternal attribute of omniscience" (229), as Ligeia assumes the role of the narrator's mother-wife. Moreover, the narrator is overtly aware of Ligeia's dominance over him. The dominant position the man would typically hold during this time period is lost to the more powerful woman. To further illustrate her dominance over the narrator, as Ligeia grows ill, he becomes subservient to her: "At high noon of the night in which she departed, beckoning me, peremptorily to her side, she bade me repeat certain verses composed by herself not many days before" (Poe, "Ligeia" 268). Then, in a surprising turn of events, especially for a man of the nineteenth century, the narrator, like a child, "obeyed her" (Poe, "Ligeia" 268). The narrator's relegation to the role of child inspires his unconscious hatred for Ligeia. Keetley writes, "the early mother-child bond is similarly scarred with fear and hostility" (1). However, because he fears her, or fears what she represents, the narrator accepts his role. Moreover, with Ligeia's death, the narrator's hatred is projected onto "the successor of . . . Ligeia" (Poe, "Ligeia" 270).

A few months after Ligeia's death, the narrator purchases an English abbey in a "remote and unsocial region of the country" (Poe, "Ligeia" 270). The narrator, "in a moment of mental alienation, . . . led from the altar as my bride . . . the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine" (Poe, "Ligeia" 270). Though he *claims* to have loved Ligeia, the opposite is true of Rowena; the narrator openly despises his new bride: "I passed . . . the unhallowed hours of the first month of our marriage—passed them with but little disquietude . . . I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man" (Poe, "Ligeia" 271-72). Some

critics believe that the narrator's hatred for Rowena is uninspired. J. Gerald Kennedy is one such critic and writes:

> In the stories depicting the death of a beautiful woman . . . the Poe protagonist typically undergoes a metamorphosis in which grief becomes murderous rage—a process seen most clearly in the contrast between the two marriages in 'Ligeia' . . . In the wake of Ligeia's death the narrator's helplessness and sorrow harden into the irrational loathing that he feels for Rowena. (540)

I am not convinced by Kennedy's assertion. It is not "helplessness and sorrow [that] harden into the . . . loathing that he feels for Rowena" (Kennedy 540); rather, it is the narrator's unconscious hatred of Ligeia that is projected onto her. Keetley, however, has a slightly different reading. She believes "the narrator's intense hatred of Rowena can partly be explained by the degree of his own repressed envy and fear of her—and the poisoning wards off the projected threat she poses in his fantasy" (7). On the contrary, though the narrator was powerless in his relationship with Ligeia on account of her intellectual superiority, he controls "the much more conventional Rowena, whose utter passivity fulfills a common nineteenth-century stereotype of 'invalid' womanhood" (Person, "Poe" 136). She is, as Person puts it, "little more than [a] passive victim" ("Poe" 134). The narrator needs Rowena to project his hatred on so that he can reclaim his dominant role. Through controlling Rowena, he eradicates his "child-like confidence" and is no longer "a child groping benighted" (Poe, "Ligeia" 266), as he was with Ligeia. The narrator even relishes his "new" role: "That my wife dreaded the fierce moodiness of my temper . . . I could not help perceiving; but it gave me rather pleasure than otherwise" (Poe, "Ligeia" 272). Unlike Keetley's assertion, Rowena clearly poses no threat to the narrator. He has no reason to fear her; thus, he exercises his dominion over her. The narrator's hatred for Rowena may seem "irrational" (540), as Kennedy puts it, because it is the loathing he truly feels for *Ligeia.*

Though Kennedy has not convinced me as to the source of the narrator's hatred of Rowena, I do, however, agree with him on at least one point: the narrator possesses "murderous

rage" (540). Once the narrator has reclaimed his dominance, Rowena has outlived her usefulness. For the opium-addicted narrator, killing her is easy. After "the hands of her menials prepared her for the tomb" (Poe, "Ligeia" 274), the narrator "sat alone, with her shrouded body, in that fantastic chamber which had received her as my bride. Wild visions, opium-engendered, flitted, shadow-like, before me" (Poe, "Ligeia" 274). These visions foreshadow Ligeia's return, and, as Dayan contends:

> Seeing the quickening, risen flesh, the narrator thinks, "Can it be Rowena?" only to recognize Ligeia. Familiar with stories of the returning dead, Poe worked them into the tale he called his "best." The spirit so fills the living body that no trace remains of the once-alive vessel; taken by the spirit, the body reacts. Its gestures and lineaments conform to ghostly demands. We are no longer dealing with a narrator in a trance, a madman who hallucinates, a drugged murderer, but the scene of possession . . . by a spirit, conjured up and rising up, like Ligeia, from quiescence to revenge. (266)

Though Dayan is correct in her interpretation that Ligeia is being resurrected, I disagree with her claim that this is merely a "scene of possession" (266). I take a different stance that will be discussed in the following paragraph. With her resurrection, "Ligeia resists a conventional female role even in her death" (Person, "Poe" 136). Person comments that

> . . . Ligeia is notable for her force of will and, arguably, her ability to overcome death . . . She wills herself back to life . . . Ligeia's resurrection may not represent the triumph of feminist self-sufficiency, but her real womanhood, at least in the area of her superior knowledge, underwrites a misandrous power of will that turns the tables on male misogyny. (Person "Poe" 136-37)

Like Kennedy, Person also suggests that the narrator killed Ligeia with his "murderous designs" ("Poe" 136). While this may be true, one thing is for certain, Ligeia's resurrection is not simply a "scene of possession" (266) as Dayan claims; rather, the narrator kills Ligeia, albeit temporary,

from his consciousness. That the narrator "CANNOT . . . remember" (Poe, "Ligeia" 262), or, as I argue, WILL NOT remember, is his attempt to repress Ligeia and the authority she has over him. McEntee shares a similar belief and writes, "And only by selective loss of memory can this narrator suppress his dependence on Ligeia" (80-81), while Keetley comments, "his dependence on her is virtually absolute" (4). With Rowena's transformation into Ligeia, Ligeia not only reappears in physical form, but also, and more importantly, returns from the narrator's unconscious. The repressed Ligeia, like any repressed memory, returns, and as a result, she reasserts her dominance over the narrator. Bonaparte states, "From the time they are bereaved, Ligeia's husband, like Berenice's lover, are opium addicts . . . opium . . . like all drugs, relaxes the control of the moral censor and so permits the infantile material buried in the unconscious to re-emerge. In this instance, it enabled . . . Ligeia to rise from her tomb" (236). Ligeia's resurrection symbolizes that, whether in life or in death, she will always control and dominate her husband, or, as Grace McEntee puts it, "never release her hold on him" (81). The narrator will forever be nothing more than a child, and as a result, will always, as he always has, loathe his mother-wife.

Chapter Two: The Fear and Threat of Sexuality – Berenice and Madeline Usher

Unlike the previous chapter in which the male protagonists fear the superior intellect Morella and Ligeia possess over them, in this chapter, it is the sexual threats of Berenice and Madeline Usher that are feared and force Egaeus and Roderick Usher to "kill" the women. In first turning my attention to "Berenice," after the first break of the "tale which should not be told" (Poe, "Berenice" 226) the narrator, Egaeus, reveals, "Berenice and I were cousins, and we grew up together in my paternal halls" (Poe, "Berenice" 226). With this line, a potential incestuous relationship between Egaeus and Berenice is foreshadowed. He admits, however, that they grew quite differently—he "ill of health and buried in gloom" and confined to "the studies of the cloister" (Poe, "Berenice" 226). Moreover, Egaeus "loitered away [his] boyhood in books" (Poe, "Berenice" 226), having been born in the library chamber of his hereditary halls. It is of little surprise, then, "that as years rolled away, . . . the noon of manhood found [him] still in the mansion of [his] fathers (Poe, "Berenice" 226). Egaeus is very cerebral, "awaking . . . into the wild dominions of monastic thought and erudition" (Poe, "Berenice" 226). Berenice, on the other hand, is described as "agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy . . . roaming carelessly through life with no thought of the shadows in her path" (Poe, "Berenice" 226). She is not once represented as having intellect, and throughout the entire tale, "She spoke no word" (Poe, "Berenice" 230). She is never revealed to have any intellectual superiority over Egaeus. Berenice is, rather, initially described as physically beautiful; however, Egaeus states, "During the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her. In the strange anomaly of my existence, feelings with me, *had never been* of the heart, and my passions *always were* of the mind" (Poe, "Berenice" 229). With these lines, Egaeus further illustrates that his desires are focused on the intellect, not the emotional. As Arthur A. Brown puts it, "[w]hen she had been beautiful, Egaeus had never loved Berenice" (457). Egaeus sees her "not as a thing to admire, but to analyze" (Poe, "Berenice" 229). Since his "passions *always were* of the mind," and his "feelings . . . *had never been* of the heart" (Poe, "Berenice" 229), viewing Berenice's

sexuality is an uncomfortable undertaking for the intellectual narrator. I find it strange, then, that "in an evil moment, I spoke to her of marriage" because "I called to mind that she had loved me long" though he "most surely had never loved her" (Poe, "Berenice" 229).

Though he had never loved her, Egaeus decides to marry Berenice. He states, "at length the period of our nuptials was approaching" (Poe, "Berenice" 229), and as she stood before him, a drastic transformation in her physical appearance had overtaken the once beautiful Berenice. He describes her "high, and very pale, and singularly placid" forehead, her "once jetty hair . . . now of a vivid yellow," and her "lifeless, and lusterless, and seemingly pupil-less" eyes from which he "shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips" (Poe, "Berenice" 230). It is at this point that Egaeus becomes powerfully disturbed as the lips "parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, *the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view" (Poe, "Berenice" 230). He wishes to God that he had never seen them, or that, after doing so, he had died. Here follows the second break of the tale, and then Egaeus states:

> The shutting of a door disturbed me, and, looking up, I found that my cousin had departed from the chamber. But from the disordered chamber of my brain, had not, alas! departed, and would not be driven away, the white and ghastly *spectrum* of the teeth. Not a speck on their surface—not a shade on their enamel—not an indenture on their edges—but what that brief period of her smile had sufficed to brand in my memory. . . . The teeth!—the teeth!—they were here, and there, and every where, and visibly and palpably before me; long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them . . . . (Poe, "Berenice" 230)

As earlier mentioned, while Berenice poses no intellectual threat to Egaeus, it is her "smile of peculiar meaning" (Poe, "Berenice" 230) and the sexuality that it represents that frightens him and threatens him. I have noted in the introduction to this essay that "Several critics have . . .

concluded that the narrator particularly fears Berenice's sexuality, which he represents as a *vagina dentata*" (Person, "Poe" 139). Marie Bonaparte is one such critic and writes:

> the notion of the female vagina being furnished with teeth, [is] . . . thus a source of danger in being able to bite and castrate. . . . Mouth and vagina are equated in the unconscious and, when Egaeus yields to the morbid impulse to draw Berenice's teeth, he yields both to the yearning for the mother's organ and to be revenged upon it, since the dangers that hedge it about make him sexually avoid all women as too menacing. His act is therefore a sort of retributive castration inflicted on the mother whom he loves, and yet hates, because obdurate to his sex-love for her in infancy. (218)

This concept of the *vagina dentata* is one reason why Egaeus is terrified of Berenice and, more notably, her smile. Perhaps it is also a contributing factor that "make[s] him sexually avoid all women [particularly Berenice]" (Bonaparte 218). From this point forward, however, Egaeus becomes obsessed with the teeth of his cousin. Moreover, as white is a symbol purity, Berenice's "excessively white" teeth hint at her sexual innocence while the descriptions "Not a speck on their surface—not a shade on their enamel—not an indenture on their edges" (Poe, "Berenice" 230) also suggest that Berenice is a virgin, a notion that Egaeus can not handle. This is threatening to Egaeus because, since he reacts so strongly and *before* the wedding ceremony, he, the cerebral, intellectual narrator, cannot cope with Berenice's emerging sexuality. If the marriage to his cousin takes place, then Egaeus must confront the part of himself that he has never been able to face—"feelings . . . of the heart" (Poe, "Berenice" 229). Karen Weekes writes, "if the 'peculiar meaning' of Berenice's grin is of carnal desire, the cerebral narrator would be doubly overcome" and correctly points out that "she is exchanging her innocence for sexuality, a prospect that would terrify her reclusive, passionless fiancé" (156). Again, Egaeus becomes obsessed with the teeth that were disclosed during that fateful smile because he is fearful of the sexuality they represent. It is his fixation on the teeth that drives him to madness:

> For these I longed with a phrenzied desire. All other matters and all different interests became absorbed in their single contemplation. They—they alone were present to the mental eye, and they, in their sole individuality became the essence of my mental life. . . . I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason. (Poe, "Berenice" 231)

By possessing the teeth of Berenice, the things that represent what he fears the most, her sexuality, Egaeus believes he can regain his sanity and return to his "passions . . . of the mind" (Poe, "Berenice" 229). Egaeus must now destroy Berenice and the part of her that terrifies him.

Throughout the tale, Egaeus' "disease" or "monomania" (Poe, "Berenice" 227), as he terms it, foreshadows his obsession with the teeth as "the powers of meditation (not to speak technically) busied and buried themselves, in the contemplation of even the most ordinary objects of the universe" (Poe, "Berenice" 227). For instance, he would "become absorbed for the better part of a summer's day in a quaint shadow falling aslant upon the tapestry, or upon the floor; . . . lose myself for an entire night in watching the steady flame of a lamp, or the embers of a fire; [and] . . . dream away whole days over the perfume of a flower" (Poe, "Berenice" 227). Egaeus would, in essence, go into a trance and lose himself for periods of time, having no recollection of his actions. This is important because while in once of these trances, Egaeus attempts to destroy Berenice and the thing that threatens him—her teeth and that which they represent. This happens for the last time after the third and final break of the tale and can be seen as Egaeus once again "losing time" and repressing the memory of his horrific act. Bonaparte writes, "Poe . . . suppress[es] this episode in the last version of the story" (217). Furthermore, the premature entombment of Berenice also serves not only as a literal burial, but also, and more important, the removal of Berenice from consciousness along with that which he fears—her sexuality. When he returns from his mental lapse he states:

> It seemed that I had newly awakened from a confused and exciting dream. I knew that it was now midnight, and I was well aware that since the setting of the

> sun Berenice had been interred. But of that dreary period which intervened I had no positive—at least no definite comprehension. Yet its memory was replete with horror—horror more horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible from ambiguity. It was a fearful page in the record of my existence, written all over with dim, and hideous, and unintelligible recollections. I strived to decypher them, but in vain . . . I had done a deed—what was it? (Poe, "Berenice" 232)

Egaeus' deed, of course, is the extraction of the still-living Berenice's teeth which gives him power over his tormentor and vanquishes his fear. However, he only begins to learn of his actions when a menial points to Egaeus' garments that "were muddy and clotted with gore" (Poe, "Berenice" 232). D. H. Lawrence writes:

> the man must go down to the sepulchre of his beloved and pull out her thirty-two small white teeth, which he carries in a box with him. It is repulsive and gloating. The teeth are the instruments of biting, of resistance, of antagonism. They often become symbols of opposition, little instruments or entities of crushing and destroying. . . . Hence the man in *Berenice* must take possession of the irreducible part of his mistress. "Toutes ses dents etaient des idees," he says. Then they are little fixed ideas of mordant hate, of which he possesses himself. (76)

Weekes, like Lawrence, also sexualizes Berenice and notes, "Several critics have noted the vampire theme in 'Berenice,' casting either Egaeus or Berenice as this Gothic figure. This reading supports the idea of a sexualized Berenice who threatens Egaeus with both literal and figurative consumption and thus suffers the resulting mutilation" (161). Hence, the teeth of Berenice, these "symbols of opposition . . . [and] entities of . . . destroying" (Lawrence 76), and, I add, symbols of sexuality, are, once removed, no longer threatening (for the time being) to the narrator.

Brown differently explains the teeth in a unique way—by looking at language. He states:

> . . . Egaeus comes to believe that the teeth of Berenice are themselves "*des idees*" ["the ideas"] . . . the narrator uses French to express the absurd, for it seems truly absurd that the teeth—that part of the living human being that seems most unfeeling, most incapable of thought or expression—would not merely represent but would exist as ideas themselves. But the association between teeth and "*des idees*," for Egaeus . . . may have much to do with the physical properties of the words—with the look and sound of them—as it does with their meanings. Both the French and the English words have a double *e*; *t* and *d* make very nearly the same sound; and, in a more humorous light, an American pronunciation of "*dees*" may sound like a French pronunciation of "teeth." What is more, by putting the French and English words together it is easy to see and hear the word "death." Egaeus has described the teeth as "excessively white" (p. 230)—that is, not merely white but an expression of whiteness, of blankness. Like language, they are an expression of death, of the absence of things . . . . (Brown 459-60)

Though I disagree with Brown's interpretation of the "excessively white" (Poe, "Berenice" 230) teeth of Berenice as "an expression of death" (460), his explanation that "it seems truly absurd that the teeth . . . would exist as ideas themselves" (460) is not foolish, as it explains another reason why Egaeus must possess them. Egaeus states, "*Des idees!*—ah *therefore* it was that I coveted them so madly! I felt that their possession alone could restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason" (Poe, "Berenice" 231). By possessing the teeth, or "ideas," Egaeus desexualizes Berenice and regains his "passions . . . of the mind" (Poe, "Berenice" 229). However, as the "tale which should not be told" (Poe, "Berenice" 226) arrives at its denouement, Egaeus realizes what he has done as he grasps the box that lay upon the table: "But I could not force it open; and in my tremor it slipped from my hands, and fell heavily, and burst into pieces; and from it, with a rattling sound, there rolled out some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor" (Poe,

"Berenice" 233). Judith E. Pike refers to "Egaeus' 'little box'" as a "secret vault . . . which it might be argued is no other than a figuration of his own psyche." The once repressed memory of Berenice has now returned from the "secret vault" of Egaeus' mind, his unconscious, and, most notable, Berenice has physically returned in the form of her extracted teeth to haunt him.

I now turn my attention to a second tale in which the sexual threat of feminine otherness causes her demise. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," the story's protagonist, Roderick Usher, writes a letter to "his best, and indeed his only personal friend," the unnamed narrator, "with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my [the narrator's] society, some alleviation of his malady" (Poe, "Fall" 318). The narrator decides to visit Usher, in part, because the letter's "wildly importunate nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply" (Poe, "Fall" 318). Regarding what he "still considered a very singular summons," the narrator arrives at "this mansion of gloom" (Poe, "Fall" 318). Upon his arrival, the narrator vividly describes the house while simultaneously describing the Ushers themselves. Here, it is important to note that "The House of Usher" refers not only to the actual house, but also to the family: "merge[d were] the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of 'The House of Usher'—an appellation which seemed to include . . . both the family and the family mansion" (Poe, "Fall" 319). To continue, the narrator states, "I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity" (Poe, "Fall" 319). With these lines, the narrator begins to more closely examine the "ancient family" (Poe, "Fall" 318) and says that "[t]he discoloration of ages had been great" (Poe, "Fall" 319), referring to the centuries-long "practice" of incest by the Ushers. He continues, "Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones" (Poe, "Fall" 319-20). In other words, the "House of Usher" seems stable, even though Roderick and Madeline, those "individual stones" (Poe, "Fall" 319-20) to which the narrator refers, are collapsing. The narrator goes on to say, "In this there was much that reminded me of the specious

totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air" (Poe, "Fall" 320). Here, the narrator describes that Roderick and Madeline themselves have been decaying in the mansion, as it is later revealed that, "in regard to the dwelling which he [Roderick] tenanted, . . . for many years, he had never ventured forth" (Poe, "Fall" 323). That "breath of . . . external air" is the narrator himself. He later states, "[b]eyond this indication of excessive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which . . . made its way down the wall . . . until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn" (Poe, "Fall" 320). Here the narrator indicates that, though Roderick and Madeline, as previously mentioned, are decaying, the foundation of the "House of Usher" appears stable; however, if one is to look closely, then one will see the Usher line beginning to crack. Scott Peeples states that not only is "the house . . . 'doubled' or reflected in the tarn, but also reflected in the double-meaning of 'house,' referring to the family as well as their dwelling" ("Poe's 'constructiveness'" 180).

It is here that I turn my attention to the previously mentioned incest that has occurred throughout the centuries of the Ushers' existence. The narrator of the tale states, "I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain" (Poe, "Fall" 318). With these lines, it is clear that Roderick and Madeline are products of incest. Peeples states, "Surprisingly, most critics manage to discuss 'Usher' without mentioning the fact that Roderick and Madeline are children of incest and quite possibly practice it themselves" (85). Though it may seem unclear whether Roderick and Madeline "practice" (85) incest, as Peeples suggests, it is difficult to refute his claim that the Ushers "are children of incest" (85). However, Lawrence contends, "Here the love is between brother and sister. When the self is broken, and the mystery of the recognition of *otherness* fails, then the longing for identification with the beloved

becomes a lust. And it is this longing for identification, utter merging, which is at the base of the incest problem" (76). Leila S. May also writes about the incestuous relationship between Roderick and Madeline and states:

> the pivotal, most intense relationship . . . is that between brother and sister. . . . Poe's [twins] . . . are rendered in clearly incestuous—and ultimately fatal—terms. Moreover, . . . it is the sister who quite literally "falls upon" her brother and kills him. The domestic ideology of mid-century America was much like that of England in its insistence on the sanctity of the brother-sister dyad. As in England, there existed a dual—and conflicting—demand that siblings were expected to have as intense a bond as any husband and wife (indeed, the sibling bond was explicitly designed to rehearse that between husband and wife). (395)

May points out that this demand was "conflicting" (395), and Roderick is undoubtedly conflicted over his relationship with Madeline, the cause of his malady. It is also important to note that the Ushers are called members of not the human race but the "Usher race" (Poe, "Fall" 318), which reinforces the notion that incest has been practiced for so long that there is an entire "race" of Ushers. As children of incest and "the last of the ancient race of the Ushers" (Poe, "Fall" 323), it is crucial for Roderick to not only impregnate his sister in order for the Usher line to continue, but also to keep the bloodline "pure" as, again, they "are the last remnants of their incomparably ancient and decayed race" (Lawrence 77). Roderick is overcome with such grief and guilt at even the *thought* of what he is faced with that he becomes ill.

This conflict, in addition to being a product of centuries of inbreeding, is again the cause of his malady for which he hopes that merely the presence of the narrator might provide some alleviation. Roderick's plan, however, is placed in jeopardy as the narrator, the aforementioned "external air" (Poe, "Fall" 320), threatens to come between Roderick and his sister. In her only pre-entombed appearance, the narrator "regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread—and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings" (Poe, "Fall" 323). When

the narrator's "glance sought instinctively and eagerly the countenance of the brother . . . he had buried his face in his hands, and I could perceive that a far more than ordinary wanness had overspread the emaciated fingers through which trickled many passionate tears" (Poe, "Fall" 323). Usher's reaction, I believe, can be viewed in two ways. To the first view, the narrator becomes threatening to Roderick for Madeline's "affection." In fact, after her "death," Roderick informs him "abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more" (Poe, "Fall" 328), perhaps to cease the narrator's thoughts about her; however, even in her "death," the narrator "could not regard her unawed" (Poe, "Fall" 329). To the second view, Roderick is overcome with grief and guilt over having to impregnate his sister to ensure the continuance of the Usher line. In this sense, it is Madeline who becomes a threat to Roderick, but she is sexually threatening to him. Faced with this threat, as well as his guilt over having to violate his sister, Roderick is forced to destroy her.

Regardless of Roderick's intentions, the narrator believes the reason he is summoned to the House of Usher, so he informs the reader, is to simply help Roderick feel better: "It was thus that he spoke of the object of my visit, of his earnest desire to see me, and of the solace he expected me to afford him" (Poe, "Fall" 322). The narrator continues, "He [Roderick] entered at some length, into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady. It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy" (Poe, "Fall" 322). The "family evil" that Roderick speaks of is, I believe, the incest that has plagued the Ushers for centuries and now plagues Roderick; it is not only responsible for Madeline's catatonic state, but also is, again, the source of Roderick's "malady" (Poe, "Fall" 322). The only remedy for Roderick is to remove the threat and kill his sister.

May, however, takes a different point of view regarding Madeline's "illness" and the "family evil." She states, "The precise nature of this 'destroyer,' . . . is none other than that 'family evil'—nineteenth-century bourgeois domestic ideology itself—'that silent, yet importunate and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of [Usher's] family, and which made *him* . . . what he was'" (May 395). I disagree with May's interpretation

regarding these two things, especially that Madeline's illness is a result of her "place" in the domestic realm during the period. Instead, I view "that silent . . . and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of [Usher's] family, and which made *him* . . . what he was" not as "nineteenth-century bourgeois domestic ideology;" rather, what made Roderick "what he was" (May 395) is centuries of incest and inbreeding. Again, "the stem of the Usher race . . . had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch . . . [and] the entire family lay in the direct line of descent" (Poe, "Fall" 318). Roderick, unquestionably a product of incest, has been greatly affected. The centuries of inbreeding within the Usher line and the genetic mutations that are its result, are not only, in part, responsible for Roderick's descent into madness, but also are responsible for his physical alteration:

> Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood. Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity; these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten. (Poe, "Fall" 321)

Roderick's change is so drastic that the narrator "doubted to whom I spoke" (Poe, "Fall" 321). So, the "family evil" (Poe, "Fall" 322) of incest and its results, not "nineteenth-century bourgeois domestic ideology," as May believes, is what "made *him* . . . what he was" (395). Consequently, it is expected that Roderick, who along with his sister are "the last of the ancient race of the

Ushers" (Poe, "Fall" 323), will continue the "practice" of the "family evil" (Poe, "Fall" 322)—incest.

Again, May argues Madeline's "'destroyer' . . . is . . . nineteenth-century domestic ideology" (395). However, there is a deeper cause for her malady. It is written, "The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character, were the usual diagnosis" (Poe, "Fall" 323). "A settled apathy" indicates that Madeline lacks feeling or emotion and is indifferent, while "a gradual wasting away of the person" (Poe, "Fall" 323) reveals that she has not eaten for a period of time. With these lines, it is evident that Madeline is suffering from depression. However, what is the cause of *her* malady? Madeline's illness, like Roderick's, also, in part, results from being faced with having to have sex with her sibling in order for the Usher race to carry on. In fact, I believe it is not only the idea of this that has placed Madeline in her present condition, but also that there is a strong possibility that she and Roderick have either had sex, or that she was taken by force (I will explore this notion more closely in my discussion of the "Mad Trist" in the following paragraphs). Again, Madeline is said to have "frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character" (Poe, "Fall" 323). In short, Madeline is in catatonic state. The reason for her psychosis, in addition to, like Roderick, being a product of centuries of inbreeding, is because she is, again, faced with either having to become impregnated by her brother to continue the family line, or she already has had intercourse with him. The trauma associated with either experience is a contributing factor to her present state of mind. As a result, it is no wonder that her physicians were "baffled" and unable to come up with the cause of her "illness" (Poe, "Fall" 323), as hers is a disease of the mind.

I previously mentioned the possibility that Roderick and Madeline have engaged in intercourse, and it is here that I turn my attention to the "Mad Trist." With the hopes of "'. . . pass[ing] away this terrible night together'" (Poe, "Fall" 332), the narrator selects the "Mad Trist"

of Sir Launcelot Canning to read to Roderick in an effort to relieve him. The narrator's endeavor, however, is soon met with unexpected results. The events in the "Mad Trist" begin to parallel what is happening in the House of Usher, and as a result, Roderick becomes even more unnerved. In addition, the characters in the "Trist" strongly resemble those in "Usher" with Roderick as Ethelred and Madeline as the hermit, as there is no evidence in the text that she has ever left her ancestral home, and later, the dragon. In fact, during the narrator's reading of the volume, he states, ". . . I paused abruptly, and . . . I did actually hear . . . a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound—the exact counterpart of what my fancy had already conjured up for the dragon's unnatural shriek as described by the romancer" (Poe, "Fall" 333). The narrator also describes Madeline, before falling heavily upon her brother and killing him and dying herself, as having "a low moaning cry" (Poe, "Fall" 335), much like the dragon who later gives "up his . . . breath" (Poe, "Fall" 333). As he reads the narrative, the narrator states, "I had arrived at that well-known portion of the story where Ethelred, the hero of the Trist, having sought in vain for peaceable admission into the dwelling of the hermit, proceeds to make good an entrance by force" (Poe, "Fall" 332). A deeper reading of these lines reveals that Roderick has attempted to have sex with Madeline, but she has rejected him. As a result, Roderick takes her by force, and the resulting trauma again explains Madeline's "frequent although transient affections of a partially cateleptical character" (Poe, "Fall" 323). The narrator continues with the words of the narrative:

> "And Ethelred, . . . waited no longer to hold parley with the hermit, who, in sooth, was of an obstinate and maliceful turn, but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders, and fearing the rising of the tempest, uplifted his mace outright, and, with blows, made quickly room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand; and now pulling therewith sturdily, he so cracked, and ripped, and tore all asunder, that the noise of the dry and hollow-sounding wood alarummed and reverberated throughout the forest." (Poe, "Fall" 332)

Here, Roderick, unable to reason with Madeline, decides to, again, take her by force. Though Madeline fights and is unwilling to be overcome by her brother, she is eventually defeated, for the time being, as Roderick "uplifted his mace outright" (Poe, "Fall" 332). The mace is a phallic symbol and is used by Roderick to assert his temporary dominance over his sister; it is a symbol of his interim authority over her.

The narrator continues reading the "Mad Trist":

> "But the good champion Ethelred, now entering within the door, was sore enraged and amazed to perceive no signal of the maliceful hermit; but in the stead thereof, a dragon of a scaly and prodigious demeanor, and of a fiery tongue, which sate in guard before a palace of gold, with a floor of silver; and upon the wall there hung a shield of shining brass with this legend enwritten—
>
> Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath been;
>
> Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win;
>
> And Ethelred uplifted his mace, and struck upon the head of the dragon, which fell before him, and gave up his pesty breath with a shriek so horrid and harsh, and withal so piercing, that Ethelred had fain to close his ears with his hands against the dreadful noise of it, the like whereof was never before heard." (Poe, "Fall" 333)

With this passage, Madeline has undergone a transformation; no longer the hermit, Madeline has now become more powerful than before. She is the obstacle that stands in the way of obtaining the prize—the shield. The shield itself is symbolic, and its inscription reinforces the incest that has, for centuries, been a part of the Usher line. The first line, "Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath been," literally describes Roderick's sexual defeat of his sister, as he "uplifted his mace" (Poe, "Fall" 333) while the second line, "Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win" (Poe, "Fall" 333), refers to the fact that if he is able to "kill" Madeline, then he will win the shield. Here, the shield can be seen, not as protective armor, but rather as a coat of arms or family crest.

In other words, if Roderick "defeats" Madeline by impregnating her, then the Usher line will continue.

Earlier in the tale, Roderick reveals his fear to the narrator, and "To an anomalous species of terror I [the narrator] found him a bounden slave" (Poe, "Fall" 322). Roderick then states, "'I shall perish,' said he, 'I *must* perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost" (Poe, "Fall" 322). However, *what*, exactly, is the undertaking over which Roderick laments? I believe he is expressing regret over having to violate his sister. He continues, "I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results" (Poe, "Fall" 322). In other words, he is terrified of the results of impregnating his sister—a child—and more important, the continuation of the Usher line. Roderick goes on to say:

> I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect—in terror. In this unnerved—in this pitiable condition—I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR." (Poe, "Fall" 322)

Roderick's words are prophetic, as they foreshadow the end of the tale. As I will discuss in more depth in the next paragraph, Roderick does, indeed, not only "abandon . . . reason" as he descends into madness, but he also "abandon[s] life" in his "struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR" (Poe, "Fall" 322)—Madeline. Beverly Voloshin writes, "Roderick feels himself to be in a struggle for survival and fears . . . Madeline" ("Poe's" 14). Madeline is described as a specter, though she is no illusion, as

> There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold—then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and

> now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated. (Poe, "Fall" 335).

I earlier mentioned that Roderick "abandon[s] . . . reason" (Poe, "Fall" 322). The verses of "The Haunted Palace" beautifully illustrate Roderick's descent into madness. A literal reading of the poem is that it about a king whose kingdom dies and whose palace is abandoned. However, a deeper reading reveals that the poem is about Usher's mind. In stanza one, "a fair and stately palace— / . . . reared its head" (Poe, "Fall" 325-26). Then, "In the monarch Thought's dominion— / It stood there!" (Poe, "Fall" 326). With these lines, the king is named: Thought who rears his head. The rest of the poem can be seen as symbolic of one's head. In stanza two, the "Banners yellow, glorious, golden, / On its roof did float and flow;" (Poe, "Fall" 326) represent hair, while in the third stanza, the "two luminous windows" (Poe, "Fall" 326) are eyes. It is important to note here that the narrator describes Roderick having "an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison" (Poe, "Fall" 321). As a result, it is more than plausible that the symbolic head in "The Haunted Palace" is Usher himself. To continue, the next stanza states, "And all with pearl and ruby glowing / Was the fair palace door" (Poe, "Fall" 326). Here, the "pearl" represents teeth and the "ruby," lips, while the "door" symbolizes the mouth. In stanza five, however, the poem takes a turn, and there is an attack upon the king: "But evil things, in robes of sorrow, / Assailed the monarch's high estate" (Poe, "Fall" 326). These "evil things" wearing "robes of sorrow" (Poe, "Fall" 326) are not concrete. The attackers that assail his high estate (that is, his mind) are depression personified, and the poem foreshadows Usher's descent into madness, which, by the last stanza, is complete. Now, instead of seeing, "Through two luminous windows . . .[,] / Spirits moving musically / To a lute's well-tuned law," (Poe, "Fall" 326) the travelers, "Through the red-litten windows, see / Vast forms that move fantastically / To a discordant melody" (Poe, "Fall" 327). With these lines, the once luminous eyes of Usher have dimmed; he is now insane. Interestingly, later in the tale the narrator states, "the luminousness of his [Usher's] eye had utterly gone out" (Poe, "Fall" 330), while his mind, once "well-tuned" (Poe,

"Fall" 326), is now in a state of discord. Finally, the door, once described "with pearl and ruby glowing," is now, like Usher, pale, as he "laugh[s]—but smile[s] no more" (Poe, "Fall" 327). Usher's descent into madness is now complete. Of "The Haunted Palace" John H. Timmerman writes, "The work precisely traces the devolution of the House of Usher from a palace governed in orderly fashion by 'Thought's Dominion' to a den of disorder in which demons flicker about like bats-except that these demons are in Usher's mind."

It is important to establish that "The Haunted Palace" is about Usher's mind because it parallels the House of Usher itself. In the opening of the tale, the "vacant eye-like windows" (Poe, "Fall" 317) and "the vacant and eye-like windows" (Poe, "Fall" 318), as described by the narrator, are symbolic, of course. Here, I refer back to Roderick's verses of "The Haunted Palace." I discussed earlier that the palace itself can be seen as symbolic of one's head, and so, too, can the House of Usher.

The narrator states, "one evening, having informed me abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more, he stated his intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight, (previously to its final internment,) in one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building" (Poe, "Fall" 328). J. Gerald Kennedy incorrectly believes that "Roderick Usher commits the atrocity of burying his sister prematurely—mindful of her predisposition to catalepsy—to protect himself from what Madeline represents: mortality, loss, and abandonment" (540). On the contrary, Madeline does not represent "mortality, loss, and abandonment" (540), as Kennedy asserts; rather, she represents the sexuality that Roderick fears. The narrator later describes the vault in which he and Roderick place Madeline's body as "lying, at great depth" (Poe, "Fall" 329). Roderick's burying of Madeline at such depths can be seen not only as a literal burying (to conceal her murder), but also, and more important, a symbolic one—Roderick is burying the memory of his sister. The great depths of the vault represent the unconscious, and Roderick's burying of his sister is his attempt to repress not only Madeline and what she represents, but also the guilt he feels over killing her. Person writes, "Initially, as fraternal twins, Roderick and

Madeline compliment each other; here in assuming a male guise, Madeline is much more a narcissistic mirror-image of her brother—as if in burying her, Roderick has meant to repress her sex, her womanhood" (*Aesthetic* 39) and that "'The Fall of the House of Usher' can thus be considered Poe's most dramatic account of the male's self-destructive repression of women" (*Aesthetic* 35). However, Lawrence perhaps puts it best when he states, "All this underground vault business in Poe only symbolizes that which takes place *beneath* the consciousness" (79) and contends "Madeline died and was carried down by her brother into the deep vaults of the house. But she was not dead. Her brother roamed about in incipient madness—a madness of unspeakable terror and guilt" (78). Person also contends, "Indeed, Madeline's startling reappearance from her tomb at the end of 'The Fall of the House of Usher' directly influences the form the narrative assumes. In Poe's parable of the imagination, Madeline is associated with the depths of the mind, . . . and the weaknesses of the flesh" (*Aesthetic* 25). Madeline's return from her tomb, more importantly, symbolizes her re-emergence from Roderick's consciousness. Lawrence writes, "It is the same old theme of 'each man kills the thing he loves'. He knew his love had killed her. He knew she died at last . . . unwilling and unappeased. So, she rose again upon him" (79). Madeline, with her escape from her tomb, has her revenge, and, again, "with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" (Poe, "Fall" 335)—that he would "abandon life . . . in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR" (Poe, "Fall" 322).

According to May, "it is significantly the *sister* who must be sacrificed—here literally entombed, buried alive deep within the foundations of the familial edifice—and it is her breaking free from that entombment that provokes the collapse of the entire structure" (391). Though May's observation is correct, I would also add that Madeline's breaking free from her entombment not only causes the collapse of the family mansion, but also, and most important, it causes the fall of the "House of Usher," that is, the end of the Usher line.

In "Morella," "Ligeia," "Berenice," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," the female protagonists are destroyed because their male counterparts fear and are threatened not only by the women themselves, but also by what they represent—intellectual and sexual dominance—which results in the loss of male authority. Person writes:

> For Poe, the best woman may very well have been a dead woman, but, as the endings of nearly every one of his stories make clear, the process within the male mind by which an image of woman is deadened inevitably results in the woman's revitalization. The state of heightened consciousness or pure rationality which seems to accompany the devitalization or disembodiment of women is violently disrupted by the very forces which have been sublimated or repressed. For nearly all of Poe's protagonists, in fact, the repression of all but the most benignly idealized image of woman consistently results in a violent shock to the creative imagination, as the woman in effect refuses to be repressed and so returns, often in vengeful form, to assert her freedom from male domination and manipulation. (Person, *Aesthetic* 40)

Though destroyed, the women return from the dead—Morella is reincarnated through her daughter, Ligeia is resurrected, Berenice returns in the form of her extracted teeth, and Madeline Usher literally returns from the tomb in which she was left to die—to haunt their male counterparts and, as a result, reclaim their dominance. More important, however, these returns from the dead represent the women's emergence from the male protagonists' unconscious where they were attempted, both literally and symbolically, to be repressed.

Works Cited

Bieganowski, Ronald. "The Self-Consuming Narrator in Poe's 'Ligeia' and 'Usher.'" *American Literature* 60.2 (1988): 175-87. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Jan. 2005.

Bonaparte, Marie. *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*. New York: Humanities, 1971.

Brown, Arthur A. "Literature and the Impossibility of Death: Poe's 'Berenice.'" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 50.4 (1996): 448-63. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Jan. 2005.

Coviello, Peter. "Poe in love: Pedophilia, morbidity, and the logic of slavery." *ELH* 70.3 (2003): 875-901. Print.

Dayan, Joan. "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves." *American Literature* 66.2 (1994): 239-73. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Jan. 2005.

Hoeveler, Diane Long. "The Hidden God and the Abjected Woman in 'The Fall of the House of Usher.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 29.3 (1992): 385-95. Print.

Johanyak, Debra. "Poesian feminism: Triumph or tragedy." *CLA Journal* 39.1 (1995): 62-70. Print.

Jordan, Cynthia S. "Poe's Re-Vision: The Recovery of the Second Story." *American Literature* 59.1 (1987): 1-19. *JSTOR*. Web. 23 June 2009.

---. *Second Stories: The Politics of Language, Form, and Gender in Early American Fictions*. Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1989. Print.

Keetley, Dawn. "Pregnant Women and Envious Men in 'Morella,' 'Berenice,' 'Ligeia,' and 'The Fall of the House of Usher.'" *Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism* 38 (2004): 1-16. Print.

Kennedy, J. Gerald. "The Violence of Melancholy: Poe against Himself." *American Literary History* 8.3 (1996): 533-51. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Jan. 2005.

Lawrence, D. H. *Studies in Classic American Literature*. New York: Viking, 1964. Print.

May, Leila S. "'Sympathies of a Scarcely Intelligible Nature': The Brother-Sister Bond in Poe's 'Fall of the House of Usher.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 30.3 (1993): 387-96.

Print.

McEntee, Grace. "Remembering Ligeia." *Studies in American Fiction* 20.1 (1992): 75-83. Print.

Peeples, Scott. *Edgar Allan Poe Revisited*. Ed. Nancy A. Walker. New York: Twayne, 1998. Print.

---. "Poe's 'constructiveness' and 'The Fall of the House of Usher.'" *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. Kevin J. Hayes. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.

Person, Leland S. *Aesthetic Headaches: Women and a Masculine Poetics in Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988. Print.

---. "Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions." *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. J. Gerald Kennedy. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.

Pike, Judith E. "Poe and the revenge of the exquisite corpse." *Studies in American Fiction* 26.2 (1998): 171-92. Print.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "Berenice." *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry, Tales, and Selected Essays*. Eds. Patrick F. Quinn and G.R. Thompson. New York: Library of America College Edition, 1996. Print.

---. "The Fall of the House of Usher." *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry, Tales, and Selected Essays*. Eds. Patrick F. Quinn and G.R. Thompson. New York: Library of America College Edition, 1996. Print.

---. "Ligeia." *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry, Tales, and Selected Essays*. Eds. Patrick F. Quinn and G.R. Thompson. New York: Library of America College Edition, 1996. Print.

---. "Morella." *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry, Tales, and Selected Essays*. Eds. Patrick F. Quinn and G.R. Thompson. New York: Library of America College Edition, 1996. Print.

Timmerman, John H. "House of mirrors: Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher.'" *Papers on Language and Literature* 39.3 (2003): 227-44. Print.

Voloshin, Beverly R. "Explanation in 'The Fall of the House of Usher.'" *Studies in Short Fiction*

23.4 (1986): 419-28. Print.

---. "Poe's The Fall of the House of Usher." *The Explicator* 46.3 (1988): 13-15. *ProQuest Research Library*. Web. 27 July 2011.

Weekes, Karen. "Poe's feminine ideal." *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. Kevin J. Hayes. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.

Zlotnick-Woldenberg, Carrie. "Edgar Allan Poe's 'Ligeia': An object-relational interpretation." *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 53.3 (1999): 403-12. Print.